Wetlands and Stream Corridors

Management Intent

The intent of this plan is to preserve the wetlands in a natural state in order to protect their hydrologic, recreational, and habitat functions. This will be accomplished by

- retention in public ownership of Class I and II wetlands whenever feasible as required in the Willow Sub-Basin Plan;
- classification of the wetlands as Wildlife Habitat/Water Resources Lands;
- establishing a system of publicly owned protective buffers surrounding the wetlands; and
- other management practices as discussed in greater detail below.

For purposes of this plan, wetlands are divided into three classes (see the Willow Sub-basin Plan guideline, page 96), which are described below:

Class I: wetlands larger than 100 acres and all wetlands with a locatable stream outlet.

Class II: wetlands between 40 and 100 acres with no outlet.

Class III: wetlands less than 40 acres with no outlet.

Classification/Reservation

Class I and II wetlands located within state ownership will be classified Wildlife Habitat/Water Resources. The state lands shown as public retention areas on the Master Plan are the lands that will be classified Wildlife Habitat/Water Resources except as noted elsewhere in this plan. Class I and II wetlands located within borough ownership will be surveyed out during the agricultural tract survey, as delineated on the Master Plan, and retained in public ownership.

Planned Actions

The farm tracts have been laid out and the land survey will be conducted in a way that reduces to a minimum the wetland areas transferred to private ownership (see page 50, Agriculture, for further discussion of land survey).

Public access to most of the wetland areas is provided by either road access, corridors of public land, or section line easements. The only exceptions to this are a few small wetland areas surrounded by Class II and III soils that are to be conveyed to private ownership as part of the farm tracts.

Management Guidelines

Wetland buffers.

1. Class I and II wetlands and certain surrounding lands (buffers) should remain in a natural state and in public ownership whenever feasible. A Class I or II wetland buffer shall generally include all soils of Class IV or worse agricultural capability (e.g., Class V, VI, etc.) that lie adjacent to the wetland or the buffer will be 100-feet back from the edge of the woody vegetation, whichever provides the greater buffer width. Maximum buffer width, however, is 300 feet. Exceptions to this guideline may be made to reduce survey costs when non-class II and III soils extend as a spur from the wetlands into class II and III soils. In those cases the small spurs of wetlands may be included in the agricultural tracts. Restrictive use covenants will be used to require that no development occurs within 100 feet of the wetlands.

2. Class III wetlands may be sold as part of a farm tract if surrounded by agricultural land subject to the proposed land sale. Draining, clearing, or other modification of a Class III wetland for agricultural uses must be approved by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough or the Department of Natural Resources and must conform to the applicable Army Corps of Engineers permit requirements (e.g., various sections of the River and Harbor Act of 1899 [33 U.S.C. 401 et seq.], section 404 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972 [33 U.S.C. 1344], and section 103 of the Marine Protection Research and Sanctuaries Act of 1972 [33 U.S.C. 1413]). Restrictive covenants will be used to require that no development occurs within 100 feet of the wetlands unless approved as outlined above.

3. Where the configuration of the wetland is such that survey along the meander of the wetland would be excessively expensive an aliquot part (rectangular) survey rather than a meander survey may be used or the number of meanders may be reduced. This may result in portions of the wetland being conveyed to private ownership. Such conveyance will be kept to a minumum. Restrictive use covenants and, where appropriate, public access easements will be applied to ensure that those portions of the wetland and associated buffer conveyed to private ownership remain in a natural state and that public access and use are maintained. No development may occur within 100 feet of the wetland.

Stream buffers.

4. Buffers will be retained in public ownership along Fish Creek and its tributaries. Generally, each buffer will include all soils Class IV or worse adjacent to the stream or the buffer will be 200 feet back from the ordinary high water mark, whichever is greater. The purpose of the buffer is to protect water quality, provide wildlife habitat, and provide for public access and use. Exceptions to this guideline may be made to reduce survey costs when non-class II and III soils extend as a spur from

the stream into class II and III soils. In no case will the buffer be less than 200 feet. This constitutes a special exception to the guideline on Fish Creek in the Willow Sub-basin Plan (page 127); it is consistent with the intent of that plan in that the 200 foot minimum width will provide the same degree of protection that is provided when the adjacent soils are class II and III. Where necessary to provide good access along Fish Creek the buffer may be wider than 200 feet (i.e. where necessary to get around swampy ground). This will be determined at the time of survey.

5. Buffers will be retained in public ownership along Homestead Creek (entering Flathorn Lake in Section 18) and the unnamed creek entering Flathorn Lake in Section 12, Township 16 North, Range 7 West, and their tributaries where there is a definable bluff along the stream. These buffers will include everything below the bluff line and a 50 foot wide strip along the top of the bluff. Where there is not a definable bluff, the buffer will be 100 feet from ordinary high water on either side of the stream. Where the bluff line cuts away from the stream into the agricultural tracts, the Master Plan Map is the guide as to where the boundary and the buffer should be. It is not the intent to enlarge the buffer beyond what is shown on the map. The Master Plan Map at 1:24,000 scale is on file at the Southcentral District Office of the Division of Land and Water Management and in the geoprocesser at the Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys.

6. All surface-disturbing activities on state lands with potential of affecting anadromous fish streams should have on-site review during the preliminary planning stage.

Stream and wetland buffers.

7. If adequate funding is obtained, a representative from the Department of Fish and Game will accompany personnel from Division of Land and Water Management or Division of Agriculture into the field during tract survey to assist in determining specific problems to be addressed in farm conservation or development plans, such as stream crossings and buffers along streams or wetlands.

8. Surveys will be conducted so as to include the buffers in the wetland or stream area and so as to distinctly mark the boundary between private and public ownership.

9. State land management decisions inside the buffer areas that involve a disposal of the state's interests or that might affect the habitat, recreational, or watershed values of the buffers will require consultation with the Department of Fish and Game and the Division of Parks.

10. The minimum width of the buffer along either streams or wetlands may be increased on a case-by-case basis where it is determined that the minimum width specified in this plan is not adequate to protect water quality. Examples of factors that could lead to requiring wider buffers are intensive use of fertilizers or pesticides adjacent to the buffers, slope, or especially permeable soils. Prior to survey of the tracts, representatives of the Divisions of Land and Water and Agriculture, the

Department of Fish & Game, and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough should make site visits to check on the adequacy of the buffers in several different locations. The visit may result in additional guidance on the types of situations requiring a wider minimum buffer width. If it is determined that a wider buffer width is needed as a result of on-the-ground inspection at the time of survey, tract boundaries should be adjusted at that time. If it is determined that a wider buffer is needed after the tract has been survyed, the additional buffer width will be established through the farm conservation plan by requiring a development set back and/or appropriate best management practices.

Development adjacent to wetlands and streams.

11. Use of water from any wetland or stream for agricultural or domestic purposes or discharge into streams or wetlands must conform to applicable permit requirements of the Division of Land and Water Management for water use permits (Certificate of Appropriation); Corps of Engineers Clean Water Act, section 404, for permits of the River and Harbors Act; section 10 permits, Department of Environmental Conservation, for various water quality standards.

12. Winter access only should be used in or across wetlands whenever feasible.

13. Cutting in wetland buffers. See Forestry Section, guideline 15, page 59.

14. Cutting in stream buffers. See Forestry Section, guideline 16, page 59.

15. Farmers who own a tract divided by a stream corridor that is retained in public ownership will be allowed access across the stream. The location and type of crossing will be specified in the farm conservation plan following consultation with the Department of Fish & Game.

16. In any further planning for or studies of Fish Creek local property owners or residents should be consulted (see appendix for list of those that have expressed interest in this plan).